

A Change Of Heart

By Shirley M. Haws

The English class was particularly dull that cold day in January. Mr. Peterson was trying in vain to explain Shakespeare's Hamlet so we could understand it. My mind just wouldn't stay in the room, so much had happened this past week.

Deciding to be married before I graduated was a big decision, but with Knollin leaving a week after graduation for Army duty there just wasn't time after, and I couldn't possibly let him go without me.

I kept telling myself over and over again that we were right, but the faces of my parents when we told them kept coming back to me. They couldn't hide the doubt and disappointment. Then there were Knollin's parents. He wouldn't even let me be there when he told them.

When I asked him how they had taken it, all he's say was, "Don't worry, we're getting married, they'll go along with it." I was sure his Dad would. He was very understanding. But that Mother of his! I could tell she didn't like me. Oh she never said anything, but there was the stiffness in her manner, and the cold way she stared at me when she thought no one was watching.

If she'd only forget the night of Seminary graduation. It always kept coming between us. Not in words, but I could tell it was there. Each time there was one of those pauses I wanted to say, "See here, that night was completely innocent. Nothing happened. I was sleepy and all I did was let the seat of the Nash down to rest while Knollin drove home. I couldn't help it if I went to sleep and he was too polite to wake me up when we got there. He couldn't help it if we slept until 4:00 A.M., and you had to come looking for us."

"I know we jumped up when you opened the car door and the lights came on, but we were startled. My blouse was untucked and my hair was ruffled from

being asleep, and for no other reasons.”

I wanted to say that, but I didn’t. I just felt my face go red and ducked my head as the guilty feeling swept over my body just as if I read had done something wrong.

Oh well, what if Mrs. Haws didn’t like me, her son did; and that was the important thing. He was all I’d ever hoped for in a husband; so kind and considerate to me and everyone else, but most important, his standards were higher than anyone I’d ever gone with. He was such a wonderful person, I just have to take the bad with the good.

It was going to be his birthday in just a few weeks, and what would I give him. Maybe I could get him some luggage to match those he gave me for Christmas or some new clothes.

My thought were suddenly interrupted by my name being called. It was Mr. Peterson. “Shirley, if you’d like to come back to earth, I have a message for you.” While I had been deep in thought, the office clerk had brought a note in and placed it on his desk. He went on. “Mrs. Edith Haws would like to see you at her home right after school.” For an instant my heart stopped beating, then it started pounding so hard it almost drowned out the giggles and the cracks made by the classmates. “Don’t worry, Shirley, she just wants to tell you how to treat her son.” “Mother-in-law trouble already huh!” “Don’t go, you’ll be sorry!

The rest of the day was a complete nightmare. I felt like a convict waiting for the electric chair. I tried not to think about it, but I could think of nothing else. What on earth could she want? I thought of all kinds of horrible things.

It seemed like a hundred years before school let out, and I was wishing it could be a hundred more. Her house was just around the corner from the school, but I had to walk around the block three times before I could muster up enough courage to walk up her sidewalk. As I reached the top of the porch and took the

two steps to the door I could hear the vacuum running and remembered what a fanatic she was about a clean house. I wiped my feet extra hard on the doormat. All I'd need on top of everything also was to track mud on her carpet.

My breath was coming faster, and I couldn't focus my eyes. I wondered if a person ever fainted because they were afraid of their boyfriend's mother. I reached a numb finger up to push the doorbell. I had an irresistible impulse to run, but it was too late for that, I could hear footsteps coming! I'd just have to face the music.

I couldn't force my eyes high enough to see the face of the person who answered the door, but the feet were her's and the voice that told me to come in sounded like hers, but somehow a little different. There was a hint of tenderness in it, and a warmth that had never been there before. She asked me to sit down. Well that was it. No more waiting. Now I'd know what she wanted.

"Shirley, it's Knollin's birthday in three weeks, and I thought you and I could plan a surprise party for him. How does that sound?" Relief flooded over me like a ray of warm sunshine after a thunderstorm. As we planned the party, I started feeling a closeness for this woman that I never thought I could. She was so kind and gracious, and did a wonderful job of putting me at ease. We had a good time planning the party. It would be the best one that had ever been given, with the two of us working together.

Before I knew it, it was time for Knollin to come home and I had to leave, so he wouldn't suspect anything. As I put my coat on, Mother Haws (for in that short time I felt so close to her I thought of her as that) put her arm around me and said; "Shirley, I'm going to love having you for a daughter. I feel you're awfully young, and I do wish you'd wait a few years, but if this is what you want, I'll do all I can to help you, and we'll have great fun planning the wedding together."

As I walked from the porch steps on the way home, a feeling of happiness was in my heart. No wonder Knolling was so special, with a mother as wonderful as his!

